

THE HELICON SERIES. IX.

MARPESSA



"ROAMING WITH MORNING THOUGHTS AMID THE DEW."

# MARPESSA

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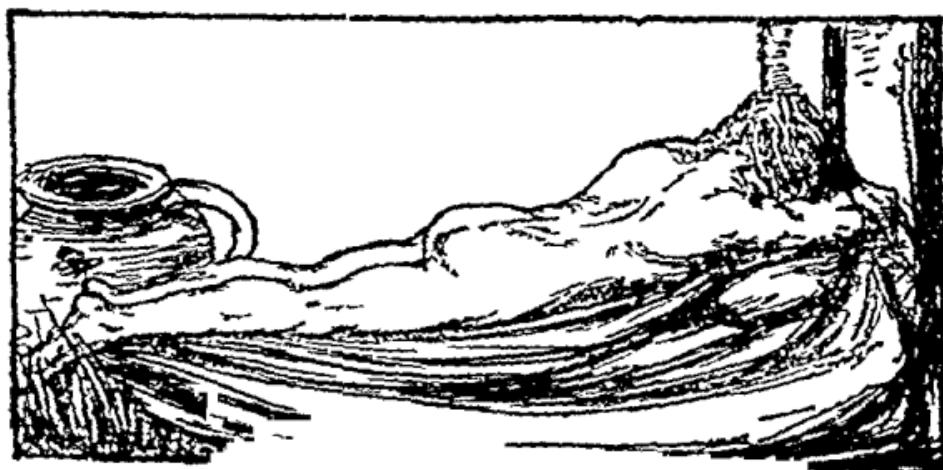
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MARPESSA



## MARPESSE

Marpessa, being given by Zeus her choice  
between the god Apollo and Idas a mortal,  
chose Idas.

WOUNDED with beauty in the summer  
night

Young Idas tossed upon his couch, and  
cried

“ Marpessa, O Marpessa ! ” From the  
dark

The floating smell of flowers invisible,  
The mystic yearning of the garden wet,  
The moonless-passing night—into his  
brain

M A R P E S S A

Wandered, until he rose and outward  
    leaned

In the dim summer : 'twas the moment  
    deep

When we are conscious of the secret  
    dawn,

Amid the darkness that we feel is green.  
To Idas had Marpessa been revealed,  
Roaming with morning thoughts amid  
    the dew,

All fresh from sleeping ; and upon her  
    cheek

The bloom of pure repose ; like perfect  
fruit

Even at the moment was her beauty ripe.  
The god Apollo from the heaven of  
heavens

Her mortal sweetness through the air  
allured ;

And on this very noon she shall decide  
'Twixt Idas and the god, take to herself  
A brief or an eternal lover. So  
When the long day that glideth without  
cloud,

M A R P E S S A

The summer day, was at her blue deep  
hour  
Of lilies musical with busy bliss,  
When every light trembled as with  
excess,  
And heat was frail, and every bush and  
flower  
Was drooping in the glory overcome :  
They three together met ; on the one  
side,  
Fresh from diffusing light on all the  
world,

Apollo ; on the other without sleep  
Idas, and in the midst Marpessa  
stood.

Just as a flower after drenching rain,  
So from the falling felicity  
Her human beauty glowed, and it was  
new ;

The bee too near her bosom drowsed  
and dropped.

But as the god sprang to embrace her, .  
they

Heard thunder, and a little afterward

The far Paternal voice, “ Let her decide ”.

And as a flame blown backward by a gust,

Burned to and fro in fury beautiful  
The murmuring god ; but at the last he spoke,

And smiled as on his favourite western isle.

“ Marpessa, though no trouble, nor any pain,

So is it willed, can touch me ; but I live

For ever in a deep deliberate bliss,  
A spirit sliding through tranquillity ;  
Yet when I saw thee I imagined  
    woe,  
That thou who art so fair, shouldst ever  
    taste  
Of the earth-sorrow : for thy life has  
    been  
The history of a flower in the air,  
Liable but to breezes and to time,  
As rich and purposeless as is the rose :  
Thy simple doom is to be beautiful.

Thee God created but to grow, not  
strive,  
And not to suffer, merely to be sweet, yet  
The favourite of his rains ; and thou  
indeed  
Lately upon the summer wast disclosed.  
Child, wilt thou taste of grief ? On  
thee the hours  
Shall feed, and bring thy soul into the  
dusk :  
Even now thy face is hastening to the  
dark !

For slowly shalt thou cool to all things  
great,  
And wisely smile at love ; and thou  
shalt see  
Beautiful Faith surrendering to Time,  
The fierce ingratitude of children  
loved,  
Ah, sting of stings ! A mourner shalt  
thou stand  
At Passion's funeral in decent garb.  
The greenly silent and cool-growing  
night

Shall be the time when most thou art  
awake,  
With dreary eyes of all illusion cured,  
Beside that stranger that thy husband is.  
But if thou'l live with me, then shalt  
thou bide  
In mere felicity above the world,  
In peace alive and moving, where to  
stir  
Is ecstasy, and thrilling is repose.  
What is the love of men that women  
seek it ?



"THE FIERCE INGRATITUDE OF CHILDREN LOVED."

In its beginning pale with cruelty,  
But having sipped of beauty, negligent,  
And full of languor and distaste : for  
they

Seeking that perfect face beyond the  
world

Approach in vision earthly semblances,  
And touch, and at the shadows flee  
away.

Then wilt thou die ? Part with eternal  
thoughts,

Lie without any hope beneath the grass,

All thy imaginations in the dust ?  
And all that tint and melody and breath,  
Which in their lovely unison are thou,  
To be dispersed upon the whirling sands !  
Thy soul blown seaward on nocturnal  
blast !

O brief and breathing creature, wilt thou  
cease  
Once having been ? Thy doom doth  
make thee rich,  
And the low grave doth make thee ex-  
quisite.

But if thou'l live with me, then! I will  
kiss

Warm immortality into thy lips ; ]  
And I will carry thee above the world,  
To share my ecstasy of flinging beams,  
And scattering without intermission joy.  
And thou shalt know that first leap of  
the sea

Toward me ; the grateful upward look  
of earth,  
Emerging roseate from her bath of  
dew,—

M A R P E S S A

We two in heaven dancing,—Babylon  
Shall flash and murmur, and cry from  
under us,  
And Nineveh catch fire, and at our  
feet  
Be hurled with her inhabitants, and all  
Adoring Asia kindle and hugely  
bloom ;—  
We two in heaven running,—continents  
Shall lighten, ocean unto ocean flash,  
And rapidly laugh till all this world is  
warm.

Or since thou art a woman, thou shalt  
have

More tender tasks ; to steal upon the  
sea,

A long expected bliss to tossing men.

Or build upon the evening sky some  
wished

And glorious metropolis of cloud.

Thou shalt persuade the harvest and  
bring on

The deeper green ; or silently attend

The fiery funeral of foliage old,

Connive with Time serene and the good  
hours.

Or,—for I know thy heart,—a dearer  
toil,—

To lure into the air a face long sick,  
To gild the brow that from its dead  
looks up,

To shine on the unforgiven of this world;  
With slow sweet surgery restore the  
brain,

And to dispel shadows and shadowy  
fear.”



“MORE TENDER TASKS; TO STEAL UPON THE SEA.”

When he had spoken, humbly Idas said :  
"After such argument what can I plead?  
Or what pale promise make ? Yet since  
it is

In women to pity rather than to aspire, |  
A little I will speak. I love thee then  
Not only for thy body packed with sweet  
Of all this world, that cup of brimming  
June,

That jar of violet wine set in the air,  
That palest rose sweet in the night of  
life ;

Nor for that stirring bosom all besieged  
By drowsing lovers, or thy perilous  
hair ;

Nor for that face that might indeed  
provoke

Invasion of old cities ; {no, nor all  
Thy freshness stealing on me like strange  
sleep.

Not for this only do I love thee, but  
Because Infinity upon thee broods ;  
And thou art full of whispers and of  
shadows.

Thou meanest what the sea has striven  
to say

So long, and yearned up the cliffs to tell ;  
Thou art what all the winds have uttered  
not,

What the still night suggesteth to the  
heart.

Thy voice is like to music heard ere  
birth,

Some spirit lute touched on a spirit sea ;  
Thy face remembered is from other  
worlds,

It has been died for, though I know not  
when,

It has been sung of, though I know not  
where.

It has the strangeness of the luring West,  
And of sad sea-horizons ; beside these  
I am aware of other times and lands,  
Of birth far - back, of lives in many  
stars.

O beauty lone and like a candle clear  
In this dark country of the world !  
Thou art

My woe, my early light, my music  
dying."

As he was speaking, she with lips  
apart

Breathed, and with dimmer eyes leaned  
through the air

As one in dream, and now his human  
hand

Took in her own ; and to Apollo spoke :  
" O gradual rose of the dim universe !  
Whose warmth steals through the grave  
unto the dead,

Soul of the early sky, the priest of bloom !  
Who beautifully goest in the West,  
Attracting as to an eternal home  
The yearning soul. Male of the female  
earth !

O eager bridegroom springing in this  
world  
As in thy bed prepared ! Fain would  
I know

Yon heavenly wafting through the  
heaven wide,  
And the large view of the subjected seas,

And famous cities, and the various toil  
Of men : all Asia at my feet spread out  
In indolent magnificence of bloom !  
Africa in her matted hair obscured,  
And India in meditation plunged !  
Then the delight of flinging the sun-  
beams,  
Diffusing silent bliss ; and yet more  
sweet,—  
To cherish fruit on the warm wall ; to  
raise  
Out of the tomb to glory the pale wheat,

Serene ascension by the rain prepared ;  
To work with the benignly falling hours,  
And beautiful slow Time. But dearest  
this

To gild the face that from its dead looks  
up,

To shine on the rejected, and arrive  
To women that remember in the night ;  
Or mend with sweetest surgery the  
mind.

And yet, forgive me if I can but speak  
Most human words. Of immortality

Thou singest : thou wouldest hold me  
from the ground,

And this just opening beauty from the  
grave.

As yet I have known no sorrow ; all my  
days

Like perfect lilies under water stir,  
And God has sheltered me from his own  
wind ;

The darling of his breezes have I been.

Yet as to one inland, that dreameth lone,  
Sea-faring men with their sea-weary eyes,

Round the inn-fire tell of some foreign  
land ;

So agéd men, much tossed about in life,  
Have told me of that country, Sorrow  
far.

How many goodly ships at anchor lie  
Within her ports ; even to me indeed  
Hath a sea-rumour through the night  
been borne.

And I myself remember, and have heard,  
Of men that did believe, women that  
loved,

That were unhappy long and now are  
dead,

With wounds that no eternity can close,  
Life had so marked them : or of others  
who

Panted toward their end, and fell on  
death

Even as sobbing runners breast the  
tape.

And most I remember of all human  
things

My mother ; often as a child I pressed

Only a dreadful pacing to and fro  
Of spirits meditating on the sun ;  
A land of baréd boughs and grieving  
wind ;  
Yet would I not forego the doom, the  
place,  
Whither my poets and my heroes went  
Before me ; warriors that with deeds  
forlorn  
Saddened my youth, yet made it great  
to live ;  
Lonely antagonists of Destiny,

M A R P E S S A

That went down scornful before many  
spears,  
Who soon as we are born, are straight  
our friends ;  
And live in simple music, country songs,  
And mournful ballads by the winter fire.  
Since they have died ; their death is  
ever mine ;  
I would not lose it. Then, thou speak'st  
of joy,  
Of immortality without one sigh,  
Existence without tears for evermore.

Thou wouldst preserve me from the  
anguish, lest  
This holy face into the dark return.  
Yet I being human, human sorrow miss.  
The half of music, I have heard men  
say,  
Is to have grieved ; when comes the  
lonely wail  
Over the mind ; old men have told it me  
Subdued after long life by simple sounds.  
The mourner is the favourite of the  
moon,

And the departing sun his glory owes  
To the eternal thoughts of creatures  
    brief,  
Who think the thing that they shall never  
    see.

Since we must die, how bright the starry  
    track !  
How wonderful in a bereavéd ear  
The Northern wind ; how strange the  
    summer night,  
The exhaling earth to those who vainly  
    love.

Out of our sadness have we made this  
world

So beautiful ; the sea sighs in our brain,  
And in our heart that yearning of the  
moon.

To all this sorrow was I born, and since  
Out of a human womb I came, I am  
Not eager to forego it ; I would scorn  
To elude the heaviness and take the  
joy,

For pain came with the sap, pangs with  
the bloom :

This is the sting, the wonder. Yet  
should I

Linger beside thee in felicity,  
Sliding with open eyes through liquid  
bliss

For ever ; still I must grow old. Ah, I  
Should ail beside thee, Apollo, and  
should note

With eyes that would not be, but yet  
are dim,

Ever so slight a change from day to  
day

In thee my husband ; watch thee nudge  
thyself

To little offices that once were sweet :

Slow where thou once wert swift, re-  
membering

To kiss those lips which once thou  
couldst not leave.

I should expect thee by the Western  
bay,

Faded, not sure of thee, with desperate  
smiles,

And pitiful devices of my dress

Or fashion of my hair : thou wouldst  
grow kind ;

Most bitter to a woman that was  
loved.

I must ensnare thee to my arms, and  
touch

Thy pity, to but hold thee to my  
heart.

But if I live with Idas, then we two

On the low earth shall prosper hand in  
hand

In odours of the open field, and live

In peaceful noises of the farm, and  
watch

The pastoral fields burned by the setting  
sun.

And he shall give me passionate chil-  
dren, not

Some radiant god that will despise me  
quite,

But clambering limbs and little hearts  
that err.

And I shall sleep beside him in the  
night,



“AND HE SHALL GIVE ME PASSIONATE CHILDREN.”

And fearful from some dream shall touch  
his hand  
Secure ; or at some festival we two  
Will wander through the lighted city  
streets ;  
And in the crowd I'll take his arm and  
feel  
Him closer for the press. So shall we live.  
And though the first sweet sting of love  
be past,  
The sweet that almost venom is ; though  
youth,

With tender and extravagant delight,  
The first and secret kiss by twilight  
hedge,  
The insane farewell repeated o'er and  
o'er,  
Pass off ; there shall succeed a faithful  
peace ;  
Beautiful friendship tried by sun and  
wind,  
Durable from the daily dust of life.  
And though with sadder, still with kinder  
eyes,

We shall behold all frailties, we shall  
haste

To pardon, and with mellowing minds  
to bless.

Then though we must grow old, we shall  
grow old

Together, and he shall not greatly miss  
My bloom faded, and waning light of  
eyes,

Too deeply gazed in ever to seem dim ;  
Nor shall we murmur at, nor much  
regret

The years that gently bend us to the  
ground,  
And gradually incline our face ; that  
we  
Leisurely stooping, and with each slow  
step,  
May curiously inspect our lasting home.  
But we shall sit with luminous holy  
smiles,  
Endeared by many griefs, by many a  
jest,  
And custom sweet of living side by side ;

And full of memories not unkindly  
glance

Upon each other. Last, we shall de-  
scend

Into the natural ground—not without  
tears—

One must go first, ah god ! one must go  
first ;

After so long one blow for both were  
good ;

Still like old friends, glad to have met,  
and leave

Behind a wholesome memory on the earth.

And thou, beautiful god, in that far time,

When in thy setting sweet thou gazest down

On this grey head, wilt thou remember then

That once I pleased thee, that I once was young ? ”

When she had spoken, Idas with one cry



"HE LOOKING DOWNWARD, AND SHE GAZING UP."

Held her, and there was silence ; while  
the god  
In anger disappeared. Then slowly they,  
He looking downward, and she gazing  
up,  
Into the evening green wandered away.

